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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to familiarize Americans with the basic structure of Hmong sentences and with words or phrases that may be useful with Hmong refugees. Hmong is represented in the Romanized Popular Alphabet. Following a general discussion of pronunciation and tone in Hmong, the structure of basic, compound, and complex sentences is discussed. Section three presents expressions commonly found in Hmong relating to proper names, titles, kinship terms, pronouns, numbers, units of measurement, time, and other conversational expressions. Three Hmong dictionaries available in the United States are listed and described. Finally, a list is provided of nine leading figures in Hmong political life over the past twenty years, with a brief explanation of their place in Hmong history. (AM)

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Indochinese Refugee Education Guides

#15

GENERAL INFORMATION SERIES: The Hmong Language: Sentences, Phrases and Words

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The purpose of this Guide is, first, to give a rough idea of the way sentences are put together in Hmong, and second, to list Hmong words and phrases of interest or use to Americans working with the Hmong refugees. This is the second of three Guides that the National Indochinese Clearinghouse is publishing on the Hmong language and culture. The first, called "The Hmong Language: Sounds and Alphabets," is a detailed description of the sound system of Hmong, and a discussion of its status as an unwritten language. The third Guide, called "Glimpses of Hmong Culture and History," is a compilation of passages on traditional Hmong culture and the recent history of the Hmongs in Laos, and a bibliography of materials on the Hmongs.

This Guide could not have been written without the help of Mr. Yang See Koumarn, a Hmong refugee living in Washington, D.C. As you can tell by the fact that there are only four sources listed in Section II D, the grammar of Hmong is virtually uncharted territory. The sketch presented in Section II is a result of dozens of question-and-answer sessions with Yang See. The information in Section III either comes out of his or his family's heads, or is his update and amplification of information presented in two of the Hmong dictionaries. We are grateful to him for his patience and his insights into his language. The sentences and phrases we present are in the White Hmong dialect, because that's the dialect Yang See speaks.

We are also grateful to Dr. David DeCamp, of the University of Texas. Dr. DeCamp's suggestions, and his comparisons of Chinese grammatical constructions with what we have found in Hmong, have been invaluable. Mr. Tou Fu Vang, of the Governor's Information Center for Asian Assistance in Illinois, has read an earlier draft; we are grateful for his comments.

We are representing Hmong in the RPA, or Romanized Popular Alphabet. This is an alphabet which was designed for Hmong in the fifties by missionary linguists and anthropologists, and which, although it was never granted official status as the alphabet for Hmong in Laos, became fairly widely used among educated Hmongs. It's the alphabet which is being taught in literacy classes in the refugee camps in Thailand, and which is being used in Hmong newsletters in the United States.

The RPA is a very efficient alphabet for Hmong, but it differs radically from other Roman alphabets like English or French. The seven or eight tones of Hmong are represented by eight different final consonants: the b in the RPA-spelled word Hmoob, for example, represents a high tone, rather than the

sound b . (It works out all right because there aren't any final consonants in Hmong.) Nasalized vowels (which are--depending on the dialect--sometimes pronounced as the vowel followed by ng) are represented by doubling the vowel: the oo in Hmoob represents ong . And there are other ways in which the RPA departs from the usual practice of Roman alphabets.

For a detailed description of Hmong pronunciation, and the way the RPA represents it, see "The Hmong Language: Sounds and Alphabets." In the meantime, however, if you ask a speaker of Hmong to read the example sentences for you, be prepared for great differences between what you read as an English speaker, and what you hear.

Sometimes a Hmong word will be pronounced with different tones depending on the tone of the preceding word. To people unaccustomed to interpreting final consonants as tones, this will look as though a different word has been used. The word for "ten," for example is usually spelled caum, but when it's preceded by a word with a high tone, it's spelled caug. These tone changes often occur in the sentences and phrases we list; rather than point them out every time they occur, we caution you here.

II. SENTENCES IN HMONG

The purpose of this section is to give you a rough idea of how sentences are constructed in Hmong, and to show you some of the ways in which they differ from English.

We will translate the words in the example sentences word-for-word, underneath the Hmong words, then provide an idiomatic translation on the right. For example:

RPA: Yaj Txhim yog ib tug Hmoob. 'Yang See is a Hmong.'
'Yang See' 'be' 'one' clf 'Hmong'

Sometimes, in the word-for-word translation, a word will be translated as a grammatical term or abbreviation, and underlined. The clf in the sentence above stands for classifier, a grammatical term we'll talk about later.

A. Basic Sentence Structure

1. Words.

Words in Hmong are usually of one syllable. (We're defining syllables in terms of tones; so words with two vowels which would be considered two-

syllabled in English, like nyiam "like" or siab "heart," are considered one-syllabled because there's only one tone in each.) There are lots of compound words in Hmong, on the order to English blackbird or untie; like English, sometimes the separate elements of the compound are words in their own right (black + bird), and sometimes they aren't (un + tie). We will represent compound words with hyphens, as in zoo-siab 'happy' (zoo by itself means 'good', and siab by itself means 'heart').

There are no suffixes in Hmong, like English s plurals or -ed past tenses or -ing participles. There are no noun declensions or verb conjugations, as there are in French or Latin. There is no grammatical gender in Hmong, i.e. no "masculine" or "feminine" nouns, although there are of course ways to express differences between the sexes. And the form of a word doesn't change depending on its use in a sentence, so kuv 'I' remains the same, whether it's used as the subject:

RPA: Kuv nyiam koj. 'I like you.'
'I' 'like' 'you'

or the object:

RPA: Koj nyiam kuv. 'You like me.'
'you' 'like' 'I'

or a possessive:

RPA: Kuv phau ntawv zoo. 'My book is good.'
'I' clf 'book' 'good'

What all this means is that Hmong is a relatively easy language to learn for English speakers, as far as sentence structure is concerned (the pronunciation is a whole different ball game), but, conversely, English constructions with suffixes will be difficult for Hmong speakers to master.

2. Order of words in sentences.

Hmong sentences have the same basic order of words that English has: subject first, then verb, then object if there is one. This is not the only possible order; Japanese, for example, has subject, then object, then verb, and Arabic has verb, then subject, then object, and so on. Here are some examples:

RPA: Tsov tom. 'Tigers bite.'
'tiger' 'bite'

RPA: Pov tau pom ib tug ntxhw. 'Pao saw an elephant.'
'Pao' past 'see' 'one' clf 'elephant'

RPA: Peb yuav mus tom lub tsev. 'We're going to go to the house.'
'we' fut. 'go' 'to' clf 'house'

Longer sentences, too, with clauses and other appurtenances, have almost the same order as English, for example:

RPA: Kuv xav tias caij nees lom-zem. 'I think that riding horses is fun.'
'I' 'think' 'that' 'ride' 'horse' 'fun'

RPA: Tus tsiaj uas koj pom yog ib tug ntxhw.
clf 'animal' 'that' 'you' 'see' 'be' 'one' clf 'elephant'

'The animal that you see is an elephant.'

Hmong does not move subject and verb around in questions the way English does. Questions are formed, instead, simply by adding the word puas before the verb, or by putting the equivalent of who, which, where or whatever in the place where it usually goes in a declarative sentence. In the examples below, note the similarities between the questions and corresponding statements in Hmong, and the dissimilarities between their English translations.

RPA: Koj nyiam kuv. 'You like me.'
'you' 'like' 'I'

RPA: Koj puas nyiam kuv? 'Do you like me?'
'you' Q 'like' 'I'

RPA: Koj mus tom lub tsev. 'You are going to the house.'
'you' 'go' 'to' clf 'house'

RPA: Koj mus qhov twg? 'Where are you going?'
'you' 'go' 'place' 'what'

Negative sentences in Hmong are as easy to construct as questions are; the word tsis added before the verb or auxiliary changes a positive sentence

to its corresponding negative:

RPA: Kuv mus tag-kis. 'I'll go tomorrow.'
'I' 'go' 'tomorrow'

RPA: Kuv tsis mus tag-kis. 'I won't go tomorrow.'
'I' neg 'go' 'tomorrow'

RPA: Muaj ntau tus tsov nyob saum roob. 'There are many tigers in the mountains.'
'have' 'many' clf 'tiger' "locate" 'on' 'mountain'

RPA: Tsis muaj ntau tus tsov nyob saum roob. 'There aren't many tigers in the mountains.'
neg 'have' 'many' clf 'tiger' 'locate' 'on' 'mountain'

3. Classifiers.

a. Structure and Meaning. One of the ways in which Hmong is quite different from English is its classifier system. You must have noticed, in the example sentences given so far, the words which we have translated as clf, short for classifier. Hmong, like Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, and most of the other languages spoken in the Far East, has a relatively elaborate system involving these classifiers. They are words which come just before the noun, and which combine with it and its modifiers in several ways to express many of the ideas that English expresses by means of suffixes--like plurals, possessives, and so on.

Each noun in Hmong has a particular classifier associated with it. We have something like "classifiers" in English: note that we can talk of a stick of gum but not *a gum, a glass of water but not *a water, a grain of salt but not *a salt, and so on.* The words stick, glass and grain in the examples above are parallel to classifiers in Hmong. But in Hmong every noun has to have a classifier, whereas in English only certain nouns do. (We can say, for example, a man.) Here are some examples of Hmong classifiers:

RPA: ib lub tsev 'a house' but not *ib tsev
'one' clf 'house' 'one' 'house'

RPA: ib phau ntawv 'a book' but not *ib ntawv
'one' clf 'book' 'one' 'book'

* The symbol * before a word or sentence is the conventional way of indicating that what follows is ungrammatical.

RPA: ib tsob ntoo 'a tree' but not *ib ntoo
'one' clf 'tree' 'one' 'tree'

The particular classifier that goes with a noun is determined pretty much by what the noun refers to, or denotes. All nouns denoting animals or human beings, for example, occur with the classifer tus. Here are some of the more frequently-occurring classifiers, with examples. (Watch for tone changes!)

Classifier:	Example:
lub, with nouns denoting inanimate objects of definite shape	ntau lub tsev 'many houses' 'many' clf 'house'
tus, with nouns denoting animals or human beings	ntau tus tsov 'many tigers' 'many' clf 'tiger'
daim, with nouns denoting flat things	ntau daim pam 'many blankets' 'many' clf 'blanket'
phau, with nouns denoting books	ntau phau ntawv 'many books' 'many' clf 'book'
tsob, with nouns denoting trees and plants	ntau tsob ntoo 'many trees' 'many' clf 'tree'
rab, with nouns denoting weapons or utensils	ib rab diav 'a spoon' 'one' clf 'spoon'
nthwv, with nouns denoting wind, smoke, steam, etc.	ib nthwv cua 'a wind' 'one' clf 'wind'
chav, with nouns denoting rooms	ib chav tsev 'a room' 'one' clf 'room'
tsab, with nouns denoting pieces of mail, articles, etc.	ib tsab ntawv 'a letter' 'one' clf 'letter'

txoj, with nouns denoting rope, thread, wire, life (!), etc.

ib txoq sia 'a life'
'one' clf 'life'

txhais, with nouns denoting arms, legs, etc.

ib txhais ceg 'a leg'
'one' clf 'leg'

Often, the same noun can occur with several different classifiers, with changes in meaning. The noun ntawv, for example, means different things depending on which classifier is used with it:

RPA: ib phau ntawv 'a book'
'one' clf '??'

RPA: ib tug ntawv 'a letter (of the alphabet)'
'one' clf '??'

RPA: ib tsab ntawv 'a letter (to mail)'
'one' clf '??'

Some of the Hmong classifiers have a plural finction: they operate exactly like our "group" words like 'herd,' 'flock,' 'pile' and so on. Which 'group' classifiers go with which nouns is again determined by what the nouns refer to: pab, for example, refers to groups of moving things, whereas pawg refers to groups of stationary things. (Yang See says both words can be used with neeg 'person,' depending on whether the people are moving around or sitting still!) So:

RPA: ib pab tsov 'a herd of tigers'
'one' clf 'tiger'

RPA: ob pawg tsev 'two groups of houses'
'two' clf 'house'

English plurals will often translate into Hmong with one of these 'group' classifiers:

RPA: Peb yog ib pab Hmoob. 'We are Hmongs.'
'we' 'be''one' clf 'Hmong'

b. Things-in-general. As we mentioned before, various combinations

of classifier, noun and so on have different meanings. A Hmong noun all by itself, without its classifier, means the noun-in-general; to arrive at the same meaning, English uses the plural ('Horses run') or the indefinite article 'a' ('A horse has four legs'), or the definite article 'the' ('The horse is a useful animal'). Here are some Hmong examples:

RPA: Mob tsis tu. 'Disease never disappears.'
'disease' 'not' 'go away'

RPA: Kuv ntshai tsov. 'I'm afraid of tigers.'
'I' 'fear' 'tiger'

RPA: Nees muaj plaub txhais ceg. 'A horse has four legs.'
'horse' 'have' '4' clf 'leg'

c. Numbers and possessives. To express such phrases as 'one horse', 'four tigers', and so on, Hmong uses the number, then the classifier, then the noun. As you have seen in many of the example sentences given already, the Hmong number for 'one', which is ib, often translates as the English indefinite article 'a'. (This construction of number plus classifier plus noun is the basis for sentences like 'You want one piece shirt?', which are supposed to mimic the efforts of Chinese speakers trying to speak English. In this case, the Chinese classifier for shirt has been translated as 'piece'.) Here are some more examples of Hmong noun phrases with numbers:

RPA: ob daig tiab 'two skirts'
'2' clf 'skirt'

RPA: kaum ib tug tsov 'eleven tigers'
'ten' 'one' clf 'tiger'

Words like coob 'many' and ntau 'many' can be used in the same place as numbers in this construction:

RPA: ntau daim tiab 'many skirts'
'many' clf 'skirt'

RPA: coob tug tsov 'many tigers'
'many' clf 'tiger'

The same construction is used to express possession. To say 'Pa's skirt', for example, the name Paj occurs (with no suffix, of course),

followed by the classifier, then the word for 'skirt':

RPA: Paj daim tiab 'Pa's skirt'
'Pa' clf 'skirt'

Pronouns can also be used to express possession. (As we mentioned earlier, the pronoun doesn't change form.) Here are some examples of possessive phrases with pronouns:

RPA: koj daim tiab 'your skirt'
'you' clf 'skirt'

RPA: nws phau ntawv 'his book'
'he' clf 'book'

RPA: peb lub tsev 'our house'
'we' clf 'house'

You can stack up numbers and possessives in Hmong, as you can in English:

RPA: kuv ob phau ntawv 'my two books'
'I' 'two' clf 'book'

d. Definites. Definite noun phrases, which are generally expressed in English with the definite article 'the', are expressed in Hmong with the classifier plus the noun:

RPA: Daim tiab dawb. 'The skirt is white.'
clf 'skirt' 'white'

RPA: Peb nyiam phau ntawv. 'We like the book.'
'we' 'like' clf 'book'

e. Adjectives. Hmong has adjectives; unlike English, they go after the noun they modify.* Here are some examples:

RPA: Mos muaj ob daig tiab dawb. 'Mo has two white skirts.'
'Mo' 'have''two' clf 'skirt''white'

RPA: Paj Lis phau ntawv liab nyob hauv lub tsev. 'Pa Li's red book is in the house.'
'Pa Li' clf 'book' 'red' 'locate' 'in' clf 'house'

* Some linguists argue the Hmong adjectives aren't adjectives at all, but verbs, and would literally translate the sentence about Mo's skirts as 'Mo' 'have' 'two' 'skirt' 'whiting'. One's position on this point depends on the linguistic theory one espouses.

4. Verbs.

As we have just shown, the Hmong system of classifiers is an aspect of Hmong sentence structure that is very different from the structure of English. Another area in which English and Hmong differ is in verbs.

The most spectacular difference between Hmong and English verbs is that Hmong verbs have no suffixes to indicate time, agreement with the subject, mood, or any other other things English verbs are famous for. The word for 'go', which is mus, for example, occurs as mus whether the sentence is in the imperative or indicative, past or future, and no matter what the subject is. (This makes Hmong verbs easy to learn: no conjugations, tenses or irregular verbs!)

a. 'be'. Speaking of irregular verbs, the Hmong equivalent of 'be' is yog (which also happens to mean 'right', 'yes' or 'correct'). It occurs in sentences like the following, in which the yog is followed by a noun:

RPA: Looj Ceeb yog ib lub zos. 'Long Cheng is a village.'
'Long Cheng' 'be' 'one' clf 'village'

RPA: Yaj Txhim yog ib tug Hmoob. 'Yang See is a Hmong.'
'Yang See' 'be' 'one' clf 'Hmong'

In sentences where in English we have a subject, then some form of 'be', then an adjective, as in 'I am happy', Hmong has just the subject, then the adjective, for example:

RPA: Kuv zoo - siab. 'I am happy.'
'I' 'happy'

RPA: Hli daim tiab zoo - nkauj. 'Hli's skirt is pretty.'
'Hli' clf 'skirt' 'pretty'

This use of the word for 'be' in sentences with nouns, but not in sentences with adjectives, is the same as in Vietnamese.

b. Expression of tenses. Tense, which is the grammatical expression of time, and which is so important in English verb phrases, is a dispensible element in Hmong sentences. If there is a word like 'today' or 'yesterday' in the sentence, it's not necessary to indicate tense in the verb at all. In the following sentences, the verbs are the same, and the time is expressed by the adverbs alone:

RPA: Kuv mus tag-kis. 'I'll go tomorrow.'
'I' 'go' 'tomorrow'

RPA: Kuv mus nag-hmo. 'I went yesterday.'
'I' 'go' 'yesterday'

Often--especially in conversation--what has already been said is enough to establish a time for the sentence, and there will be no indication of tense whatever. The following sentence:

RPA: Kuv nyeem daim xov-xwm.
'I' 'read' clf 'newspaper'

can mean 'I read the newspaper,' if it is in answer to the question 'What did you do last night?'; or it can mean 'I'm reading the paper,' if it is in answer to the question 'What are you doing?'; or it can mean 'I'm going to read the newspaper,' if it is in answer to the question 'What are you going to do now?'

c. Auxiliary particles. There are times, of course, when it is necessary to express in Hmong the sorts of grammatical information carried in English by the different verbal suffixes and auxiliaries. Hmong does all this with auxiliary particles, which are words which occur between the subject and the verb. (You have already seen the question particle puas and the negative particle tsis.) Each particle gives a particular meaning or grammatical focus to the sentence, and they can be stacked up in a sentence (in a rigid order). In the following examples, we will add a particle at a time: note the shifts in meaning.

RPA: Koj yuav mus. 'You will go.'
'you' 'will' 'go'

RPA: Koj yuav tsum mus. 'You should go.'
'you' 'will' 'must' 'go'

RPA: Koj yuav tsum tau mus. 'You should have gone.'
'you' 'will' 'must' past 'go'

RPA: Koj yuav tsum tsis tau mus. 'You shouldn't have gone.'
'you''will' 'must' neg past 'go'

RPA: Koj puas yuav tsum tsis tau mus? 'Shouldn't you
'you' Q 'will' 'must' neg past 'go' have gone?'

And so on. There are more particles, but we couldn't add them to this sentence and still make sense!

There's another set of auxiliary particles that occur after the verb. The two that we have run across most often are lawm, a past or perfect tense marker, and tau, which looks just like the tau that comes in front of the verb and is another past tense marker (it's in the last three sentences above), but means 'can' or 'be able to' when it comes after the verb. Here are some examples of lawm and tau:

RPA: Kuv mus lawm. 'I went.'
'I' 'go' past

RPA: Kuv hais tau lus As-mes-lis-kas. 'I can speak English.'
'I' 'speak' 'can' clf 'American'

Most of the other particles which occur after the verb seem to be what the dictionary-writer Heimbach calls 'post-verbal intensifiers', or words which function like adverbs to 'intensify' the meaning of the verb in some way. (We can't, at this point, tell the difference--if there is any!--between auxiliary particles and adverbs in Hmong.) Heimbach has a long list of these in his dictionary: here are some examples.

RPA: Nws tsis ua nws txoj hauj-lwm li. 'He never does his
'he' neg 'do' 'he' clf 'job' 'never' job.'

RPA: Cov poj-niam nyiav nplawg ntias. 'The women mourn together.'
'group' 'woman' 'mourn' 'together'

RPA: Peb tos ntsuj ntsoov neb. 'We're always waiting for you.'
'we' 'await' 'always' 'you'

B. Compound Sentences

Hmong has them, of course--every language does--and they are formed pretty much as they are in English, with conjunctions. Here are some examples, with the conjunctions circled:

RPA: Pia yog Yaj Txhim poj niam thiab nkawd muaj ib tug tub.
'Pia''be' 'Yang See' clf 'wife' 'and' 'they''have''one'clf 'son'

'Pia is Yang See's wife, and they have one son.'

RPA: Kuv mus tom lub nkoj ces kuv los tsev. 'I went to the
'I' 'go' 'to' clf 'boat' 'then' 'I''return''home' boat, then I
came home.'

RPA: Nws mus tom rooj-qav tab-sis nws tsis xav noj mov.
'he' 'go' 'to' 'party' 'but' 'he' neg 'want' 'eat'

'He went to the party but he didn't want to eat.'

RPA: Kuv tsis muaj nyiaj mas kuv tsis mus. 'I didn't have money
'I' 'not''have''money' 'so' 'I' neg 'go' so I didn't go.'

RPA: Koj yuav tsum cheb koj lub txaj-pw tsis li kuv yuav npau-taws.
'you''will''must''clean''you' clf 'bed' 'or' 'I' 'will' 'angry'

'Clean up your bed (room) or I'll be angry.'

C. Complex Sentences

Hmong, again like all other languages, has ways in which sentences can be embedded in one another to express various grammatical relationships. For the most part, these complex sentences are formed roughly as they are in English. (They might look different from their English counterparts on the surface, but from a grammarian's point of view the overall constructions are quite similar. Look, for example, at the following sentence, which has a relative clause in it:

RPA: Kuv tau pom tus neeg uas tau xa ib tsab ntawv rau koj.
'I' past 'see'clf 'man' that past 'send''one' clf 'letter''to''you'

'I saw the man that sent a letter to you.'

Now compare it to the same sentence in Turkish, a language which is very different in grammatical structure from English:

Size mektup gönderen kişiyi gördüm.
'you'-'to' 'letter' 'send'-part 'person'-obj. 'see'-past-'I'

As you can see from the word-for-word translations, the Hmong and English sentences are much more similar than either is to the Turkish equiva-

lent. This similarity between Hmong and English is coincidental--the two languages are of course not related to each other at all.

Here are some examples of relative clauses, which are sentences modifying nouns:

RPA: Tus hluas-nkauj uas koj nyiam yuav txiv lawm.
clf 'girl' that 'you' 'like' 'marry' 'man' past

'The girl that you love got married.'

RPA: Cov noog uas ya saud yog nquab.
'group''bird' that 'fly' 'above' 'be' 'pigeon'

'The birds that are flying overhead are pigeons.'

RPA: Lub khob uas koj siv haus-dej tawg lawm.
clf 'cup' that 'you' 'use' 'drink' 'break' past

'The cup that you use to drink out of broke.'

Here are some examples of noun clauses, which are sentences that function as nouns:

RPA: Paj hais tias lawv tuaj tsis tau tom rooj qav.
'Pa' 'say' that 'they' 'come' neg 'can' 'to' clf 'party'

'Pa says that they can't come to the party.'

RPA: Kuv ntshai tias tsam nws lov ceg.
'I' 'fear' that 'maybe' 'he' 'break''leg'

'I'm afraid he broke his leg.'

RPA: Nws hais tias kom koj los tsev.
'she' 'say' that imp 'you''return''home'

'She told you to come home.'

Note that this last sentence translates into English with an infinitive ('to' plus a verb). Other English infinitives translate back into Hmong as just the verb:

RPA: Liab paub hais plaub yam lus. 'Lia knows how to speak
'Lia' 'know' 'speak' '4' clf 'language' four languages.'

RPA: Kuv tab-tom kawm xaws khaub ncaws.
'I' progressive 'learn' 'sew' 'clothes'
'I am learning to sew.'

RPA: Caij nees lom-zem. 'It's fun to ride horses.'
'ride' 'horse' 'fun'

Conditional sentences in Hmong are quite different from their English counterparts. These are sentences which talk about possible conditions ('If it rains, we'll get wet'), and non-existent conditions ('If it were raining, we would get wet'). The grammatical folderol involved in expressing conditional sentences tends to get messy--as anyone who has tackled subjunctives (verb forms involved in conditionals) in just about any language is aware!

Conditional sentences in Hmong involve the word yog, which you'll recall is the word for 'be', and also for 'right, correct'; yog in Hmong conditionals translates as English 'if'. Then, the presence or absence of the future particle yuav and the past particle tau indicate the tense. Here are examples of the same conditional sentence with different tenses:

RPA: Yog ntuj los nag peb yuav ntub. 'If it rains, we'll
'if' 'sky' 'come' 'rain' 'we' fut 'get wet' get wet.'

or

RPA: Yog ntuj yuav los nag peb yuav ntub.
'if' 'sky' fut 'come''rain' 'we' fut 'get wet'

RPA: Yog ntuj tau los nag peb yuav tau ntub.
'if' 'sky' past 'come''rain' 'we' fut past 'get wet'
'If it had rained, we would have gotten wet.'

Here are some more conditionals:

RPA: Yog kuv mus koj puas yuav quaj? 'If I go, will you cry?'
'if' 'I' 'go' 'you' Q fut 'cry'

RPA: Yog koj yog Hmoob koj lub npe yuav yog Liag.
'if' 'you''be' 'Hmong' 'you' clf 'name' fut 'be' 'Lia'
'If you were a Hmong, your name would be Lia.'

D. References

We hope that this brief description has given you a notion of the way sentences are constructed in Hmong. The example sentences we have given are representative of formal or careful speech. But just as in English we drop phrases, add parenthetical elements like 'y'know', and in general shorten and modify what we think of as "formal" speech to suit informal conversational needs, so will natural, conversational Hmong be far less formal than our description would seem to imply.

The references cited below are all we have been able to find on Hmong grammar. Already, however, an interest in Hmong is beginning to develop in universities in the United States. Working on a "new" language is an exciting prospect for linguists, and the presence of Hmong speakers in university communities is an opportunity very hard to resist!

Barney, G. Linwood, and William A. Smalley. Third Report on Meo (Miao): Orthography and Grammar. Unpub., 1953.

A tagmemic analysis of Hmong sentence and phrase structure, largely devoted to classifying words into parts of speech. Charts of pre- and post-verbal intensifiers are given, and sentences of a running text are broken down into immediate constituents.

Heimbach, Ernest E. White Meo-English Dictionary: Data Paper No. 75, Southeast Asia Program, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University, Uthaca, NY 1969.

This dictionary is described more fully in Section III of this Guide. Appendices which deal with Hmong grammar are Appendix 2, a list of classifiers, with the classes of objects they occur with; and Appendix 8, a list of the post-verbal intensifiers, with example phrases and translations.

Miao Language Team, Division of Minority Languages, Institute of Races, Chinese Academy of Sciences. 'A Brief Description of the Miao Language'. In H.C. Purnell, Jr., ed., Miao and Yao Linguistic Studies (Selected articles in Chinese translated by Chang Yu-hung and Chu Kwo-ray). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1972.

Contains, besides an account of the Miao (Hmong) whereabouts in China and a sketch of the phonological system, a brief presentation of the structure of words and sentences in the various dialects of Miao spoken in China. These dialects differ in several respects from the Hmong dialects spoken in Laos--or it might be that the writers were interested in stressing the points in which these dialects resemble Chinese. The article deals mostly with morphological alternations, but gives examples of different sentence constructions.

P'an Yuan and Ts'ao Ts'ui-yun. 'Four-syllable Coordinative Constructions in the Miao Language of Eastern Kweichow'. in H.C. Purnell, Jr., ed., Miao and Yao Linguistic Studies (Selected articles in Chinese translated by Chang Yu-hung and Chu Kwo-ray). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1972.

A discussion of four-word idiomatic expressions in Miao, and a classification of them into fifteen different types. These expressions have a variety of functions in sentences, but resist--as idioms generally do--consistent grammatical classification or analysis.

III. WORDS AND PHRASES

In this section, we have collected information of the sort that typically appears in dictionary appendices--names, units of measurement, and so on. In cases where we thought you would want to take a stab at pronouncing the various words, we have rewritten each in a rough phonetic alphabet which is as close to English as we can get. This pronunciation guide will always be written between []'s. There's a detailed description of Hmong pronunciation in the Guide "The Hmong Language: Sounds and Alphabets". In general, the letters of the phonetic alphabet represent roughly the same sounds they do in English. Unfamiliar symbols are [ɨ], which is the vowel in the second syllable of the word roses; [ɔ], the vowel in caught; [əɨ], which is roughly the vowel in duck; and [hm], [hn], and [hl], which are m, n and l, pronounced without the vocal cords vibrating. (Ask a Hmong friend to demonstrate these for you.) The number above and to the right of each word represents the tone associated with that word.

We have used the units of measurement, or time phrases, or whatever, in example sentences wherever we thought it would be useful.

A. Hmong sub-groups in the United States

There are two major dialects of Hmong, White Hmong and Blue/Green Hmong, spoken among the refugees; sub-grouping within these dialects appears to be determined by cultural customs. The particular names typically refer to color or decoration on articles of clothing, like the women's skirts.

Sub-group	Pronunciation	Translation	Comments
Hmoob Dawb	[hmong^{1} dəɨ^{1}]	'White Hmong'	
Hmoob Ntsuab	[hmong^{1} njua^{1}]	'Blue/green Hmong'	The word ntsuab translates as

Sub-group	Pronunciation	Translation	Comments
			'blue' or 'green' depending on the exact shade referred to.
Hmoob Lees	[hmong^{1} leng^{5}]	'Striped Hmong'	This is the White Hmongs' name for the Blue/Green Hmongs, who prefer to be called Hmoob Ntsuab.
Hmoob Txaij	[hmong^{1} tsai^{2}]	'Striped Hmong'	A sub-division of the White Hmongs.
Hmoob Dub	[hmong^{1} du^{1}]	'Black Hmong'	A sub-division of the Blue/Green Hmongs.
Hmong Xiav	[hmong^{1} sia^{3}]	'Dark blue Hmong'	A sub-division of the Blue/Green Hmongs.

B. Hmong clans

All Hmong society is divided into clans; children are automatically members of their father's clan. Clan membership determines all kinds of social behavior, from titles of address to possible partners in marriage. Clan names are not last names or surnames as we think of them, but most of the Hmong refugees in the United States have adopted their clan names as surnames for official purposes like school registration, social security and immigration procedures. As there are only about twenty clans, this accounts for the small number of 'last' names among the Hmong refugees in the United States. In the Other Spellings column below, we have listed the various ways the clan names have been spelled--you'll notice that there's often only the vaguest connection between the way a name is actually pronounced by Hmong speakers, and its 'official' spellings!

RPA Spelling	Pronunciation	Other Spellings
Faj	[fa^{2}]	Fang
Ham	[ha^{7}]	Hang
Hawj	[ha^{2}]	Heu, Her

RPA Spelling	Pronunciation	Other Spellings
Koo	[kong^{4}]	Kong
Kwm	[kɨ^{7}]	Ku, Kue
Khab	[k'a^{1}]	Khang
Lauj	[lau^{2}]	Lo, Lor, Lau
Lis	[li^{5}]	Ly, Le, Li, Lee
Muas	[mua^{5}]	Moua
Phab	[p'a^{1}]	Phang
Sib	[shi^{1}]	Xe
Thoj	[t'ɔ^{2}]	Thao
Tsab	[cha^{1}]	Chang
Tsu	[chu^{4}]	Tchou, Chou
Txum	[tsu^{7}]	Txu
Vaj	[va^{2}]	Vang
Vwj	[vɨ^{2}]	Vue, Vu
Xyeem	[syəng^{7}]	Cheng
Xyooj	[syong^{2}]	Xiong
Yaj	[ya^{2}]	Yang

C. Some common given names for Hmong girls

RPA Spelling	Pronunciation	Other Spellings
Choo	[ty'ong^{4}]	Chong
Dawb	[dəi^{1}]	Daw
Diav	[dia^{3}]	Dia
Hli	[hli^{4}]	Hli
Hnub	[hnu^{1}]	Nu, Nou
Iab	[ia^{1}]	Ia
Kub	[ku^{1}]	Kou, Ku

RPA Spelling	Pronunciation	Other Spellings
Maiv	[mai^{3}]	Mai, My, May
Mos	[mɔ^{5}]	Mo
Nyiaj	[nyia^{2}]	Ngia, Nhia
Npauj	[mbau]	Bao, Bau
Nplias	[mblia^{5}]	Blia
Ntsuab	[njua^{1}]	Njua
Ntxawm	[ndzəɨ^{7}]	Geu
Ntxhiav	[nts'ia^{3}]	Cie
N*xhoo	[nts'ong^{4}]	Song
Pag	[pa^{6}]	Pa
Rwm	[ṭɨ^{7}]	True, Tue, Treu
Rhia	[ṭ'ia^{4}]	Tia, Tria
Tooj	[tong^{2}]	Tong
Txiab	[tsia^{1}]	Chia
Xis	[si^{5}]	Xe, Xy, Se, See, Si
Xia	[sia^{4}]	Xia, Sia
Yeeb	[yəng^{1}]	Ying
Yiv	[yi^{3}]	Ye, Yi

D. Some common given names for Hmong boys

RPA Spelling	Pronunciation	Other Spellings
Choj	[ty'ɔ^{2}]	Cho
Foom	[fong^{7}]	Foung
Fwm	[fɨ^{7}]	Fu, Fue
Kub	[ku^{1}]	Kou
Leej	[ləng^{2}]	Leng
Liab	[lia^{1}]	Lia

Looj	[long^{2}]	Long
Mas	[ma^{5}]	Ma
Neeb	[nəng^{1}]	Neng
Npis	[mbi^{3}]	By
Ntaj	[nda^{2}]	Dang
Ntxawg	[ntsau^{6}]	Geu
Nyiaj	[nyia^{2}]	Ngia, Nhia
Pov	[pɔ^{3}]	Pao
Riam	[ṭia^{7}]	Tia, Tria
Tooj	[tong^{2}]	Tong
Tub	[tu^{1}]	Tou, Tu
Thoob	[t'ong^{1}]	Thong
Tsab	[cha^{1}]	Cha
Tsu	[chu^{4}]	Chu, Chou
Tswb	[chɨ^{1}]	Chu, Cheu, Chue
Txiab	[tsia^{1}]	Chia
Txiaj	[tsia^{2}]	Chia, Txia
Txhim	[ts'i^{7}]	Se, Txi
Txhiaj	[ts'ia^{2}]	Chia, Txia
Xauv	[sau^{3}]	Sao, Xao
Xeeb	[səng^{1}]	Xeng, Seng

E. Honorary names

It is a custom in Hmong society for a man's parents-in-law to give him an honorary name. After the ceremony in which the name is given, the man is then called by the honorary name as well as his given name. So Pov, on marrying and settling down, is given the honorary name Paj by his wife's parents, and ever after is addressed as Paj Pov.

F. Diminutives

Sometimes a Hmong child will customarily be called by his given name, preceded by the diminutive Tub (pronounced [tu^{1}]) for boys, or Maiv (pronounced [mai^{3}]) for girls. The famous Hmong leader, Touby Lyfoung, for example, is called by his given name Npis, preceded by Tub; the usual Romanized spelling Touby combines the two names into one. As will be explained in the next section, Tub and Maiv are also the general terms by which children are addressed.

G. Titles of address

Members of Hmong society address one another in formal circumstances with titles, the choice of which is determined by the generations to which the addresser and addressee belong. These titles are kinship names which have been extended to all people of the appropriate generation. Generations are determined by actual lineage, not age, so it's quite possible that an older man would address a much younger man by the equivalent of 'uncle'. Yang See says that one of the first things established, in talking to a stranger, is the generation relationship, so that both parties know which title of address to use.

These titles are used by themselves, or followed by the individual's given name; if a woman is married, the title is followed by her husband's name. In the chart on the next pages, we will list the generation addressed, the title, its pronunciation, its meaning as a kinship term, and examples with the woman's given name Hli, and the man's given name Tsab preceded by the honorary name Paj. To show how titles are used with the husband's name, we are adding a third character, Paj Tsab's wife Mos.

Title given to:	Title:	Pronunciation:	Meaning:	Example:
Men three generations above	Yawg Koob	[yəɨ^{6} kong^{1}]	'great grandfather'	Yawg Koob Paj Tsab
Women three generations above	Pog Koob	[pɔ^{6} kong^{1}]	'great grandmother'	Pog Koob Hli, Pog Koob Paj Tsab
Men two generations above	Yawg	[yəɨ^{6}]	'grandfather'	Yawg Paj Tsab
Women two generations above	Pog	[po^{6}]	grandmother'	Pog Hli, Pog Paj Tsab
Men one generation above	Txiv Ntxawm	[tsi^{3} ntsəɨ^{7}]	'father's brother'	Txiv Ntxawm Paj Tsab
Women one generation above	Phauj	[p'au^{2}]	'father's sister'	Phauj Hli, Phauj Paj Tsab
Men of same generation outside one's clan	Dab Laug	[da^{1} lau^{6}]	'sister's husband'	Dab Laug Paj Tsab
Women of same generation outside one's clan	Niam Dab Laug	[nia^{7} da^{1} lau^{6}]	'wife's brother's wife'	Niam Dab Laug Paj Tsab
Men of same generation within one's clan	By given name			Paj Tsab

Women of same generation within one's clan	By given name			Hli, Mos
Men of younger generations	Tub or by given name	[tu^{1}]	'son'	Tub Tsab, Tsab
Women of younger generations	Maiv or by given name	[mai^{3}]	'sweet'	Maiv Hli, Hli Maiv Mos, Mos
Men whose name is unknown (on the street, etc.)	Txiv Ntxawm	[tsi^{3} ntsəɨ^{7}]	'father's brother'	Txiv Ntxawm
Women whose name is unknown	Phauj	[p'au^{2}]	'father's sister'	Phauj

H. Kinship terms

The Hmongs have a much, much more complicated system of kinship terms than Americans do; whereas we have relatively few terms like aunt, cousin, grandfather, and so on, there are many such terms in Hmong. (The Hmong kinship system has been described in several anthropological articles.) These terms are used either in sentences equivalent to "My aunt had five children", or in addressing relatives, e.g. "Aunt Paj" or "Brother Pov". In direct address situations, a married woman will be addressed by the appropriate term followed by her husband's name; so Mos, who is married to Pov, will be called Phauj Pov by her nieces and nephews, whereas her unmarried sister Hli will be called Phauj Hli. In the chart below, the terms are arranged by generation.

Relationship	Kinship term
Great-great grandparents	
paternal great-great grandfather	yawg suab
paternal great-great grandmother	poq suab
maternal great-great grandfather	yawm txiv yawg suab
maternal great-great grandmother	niam tais pog suab
Great grandparents	
paternal great grandfather	yawg koob
paternal great grandmother	pog koob
maternal great grandfather	yawm txiv yawg koob
maternal great grandmother	niam tais pog koob
Grandparents	
paternal grandfather	yawg
paternal grandmother	pog
maternal grandfather	yawm txiv yawg
maternal grandmother	niam tais pog
paternal grandfather's sister	phauj pog
Parents	
father	txiv
mother	niam
father-in-law	yawm txiv
mother-in-law	niam tais

Uncles	
father's older brother	txiv hlob
father's younger brother	txiv ntxawm
mother's brother	dab laug
Aunts	
father's sister	phauj
mother's older sister	niam tais (hlob)
mother's younger sister	niam tais (hluas)
father's older brother's wife	niam hlob
father's younger brother's wife	niam ntxawm
mother's brother's wife	niam dab laug
Spouses	
husband	tus txiv
wife	poj niam
Brothers	
older brother as called by brothers	tij laug
younger brother as called by brothers	kwv
older brother as called by sisters	nus hlob
younger brother as called by sisters	nus yau
Brothers-in-law	
husband's older brother as called by wife and her younger sisters	txiv laus
husband's younger brother as called by wife and her older sisters	txiv hluas
wife's older brother as called by husband and his siblings	yawm dab hlob, or dab laug hlob
wife's younger brother as called by husband and his siblings	yawm dab yau, or dab laug yau
sister's husband as called by brothers	yawm yij
Sisters	
as called by brothers	muam
as called by sisters	viv ncaus
Sisters-in-law	
older brother's wife as called by brothers	niam tij

(sisters-in-law)

younger brother's wife as called by brothers	niam ntxawm
brother's wife as called by sisters	tis nyab
wife's older sister	niam laus, or tais laus
wife's younger sister	niam hluas, or tais hluas

Cousins

specific terms as for brothers and sisters

In-laws

father and father-in-law call each other	cuas
mother and mother-in-law call each other	poj cuag

Children

son	tub, me tub
daughter	ntxhais, me ntxhais
son-in-law	vauv
daughter-in-law	nyab

Nephews

son of older brother	tij tub
son of younger brother	kwv tub

Grandchildren

grandchild	xeeb ntxwv

Great-grandchildren

great-grandchild	xeeb muj mum

General terms

great-great grandparents	pog suab thiab yawg suab
great-grandparents	pog koob thiab yawg koob
grandparents	pog thiab yawg
parents	niam thiab txiv
parents-in-law	niam tais yawm txiv
aunt	phauj
uncle	txiv ntxawm
brothers and boy cousins	kwv tij

sisters and girl cousins	viv ncaus
siblings or cousins	nus muag
sister-in-law	tais
children	me nyuam, or me tub me nyuam
woman's parents-in-law	niam pog txiv yawg
parents and parents-in-law refer to one another as	poj cuag yawg cuag

Examples:

Yawg suab Ntxhoo Tsa muaj kaum ob leeg tub. 'Great-great grandfather Ntxhoo Tsa had twelve sons.'
'g.g.g.f.' 'Ntxhoo Tsa' 'has' '12' clf 'son'

Yawg koob Txhiaj Sawm yog yawg suab Ntxhoo Tsa yug.
'g.g.f.' 'Txhiaj Sawm' 'be' 'g.g.g.f.' 'Ntxhoo Tsa' 'born'

'Great grandfather Txhiaj Sawm was the son of great-great grandfather Ntxhoo Tsa.'

Phauj Diav muaj peb tug ntxhais. 'Aunt Diav has three daughters.'
'aunt' 'Diav' 'have' '3' clf 'daughter'

Kuv yawm txiv yuav tuaj sai. 'My father-in-law will come soon.'
'I' 'f.-in-law' fut 'come' 'soon'

I. Personal pronouns

Hmong personal pronouns function pretty much as English pronouns do, except that there are no changes on the order of I - my - me business in English. There's only one third person singular pronoun; Hmong makes no distinction between he, she and it. There are separate pronouns referring to two people, in addition to the usual singular/plural.

Singular

1. kuv [ku^{3}] 'I'
2. koj [ko^{2}] 'you'
3. nws [nɨ^{5}] 'he, she, it'

Dual

1. wb [i^{1}] 'we two'
2. meb [mey^{1}] 'you two' (Blue/Green); neb [ney^{1}] 'you two' (White)
3. nkawd [ngkəɨ^{8}] 'they two'

Plural

1. peb [pey^{1}] 'we'
2. nej [ney^{2}] 'you-all'
3. lawv [lə^{3}] 'they'

J. Numbers

The numbers are listed below first in the RPA, then in the phonetic alphabet, then in translation. You'll notice that the word caum appears sometimes as caum, sometimes as caug; this is a tone change determined by the tone of the preceding syllable.

ib [i^{1}] 'one
ob [ɔ^{2}] 'two'
peb [pey^{1}] 'three'
plaub [plau^{1}] 'four'
tsib [chi^{1}] 'five'
rau [ṭau^{4}] 'six'
xya [sya^{4}] 'seven'
yim [yi^{7}] 'eight'
cuaj [tyua^{2}] 'nine'
kaum [kau^{7}] 'ten'

kaum ib [kau^{7} i^{1}] 'eleven'
kaum ob [kau^{7} o^{1}] 'twelve'
kaum peb [kau^{7} pey^{1}] 'thirteen'
kaum plaub [kau^{7} plau^{1}] 'fourteen'
kaum tsib [kau^{7} chi^{1}] 'fifteen'
kaum rau [kau^{7} tau^{4}] 'sixteen'
kaum xya (kau^{7} sya^{4}] 'seventeen'
kaum yim [kau^{7} yi^{7}] 'eighteen'
kaum cuaj [kau^{7} tyua^{2}] 'nineteen'
nees-nkaum [neng^{5} ngkau^{7}] 'twenty'

nees-kaum ib [neng^{5} ngkau^{7} i^{1}] 'twenty-one'
nees-nkaum yim [neng^{5} ngkau^{7} yi^{7}] 'twenty-eight'

peb caug [pey^{1} tyau^{6}] 'thirty'
peb caug ib [pey^{1} tyau^{6} i^{1}] 'thirty-one'
plaub caug [plau^{1} tyau^{6}] 'forty'
tsib caug [chi^{1} tyau^{6}] 'fifty'
rau caum [ṭau^{4} tyau^{7}] 'sixty'
xya caum [sya^{4} tyau^{7}] 'seventy'

yim caum [yi^{7} tyau^{7}] 'eighty'
cuaj caum [tyua^{2} tyau^{7}] 'ninety'
ib puas [i^{1} pua^{5}] 'one hundred'
peb puas [pey^{1} pua^{5}] 'three hundred'
peb puas plaub caug tsib
[pey^{1} pua^{5} plau^{1} tyau^{6} chi^{1}]
'three hundred forty-five'
txhiab [ts'ia^{5}] 'thousand'

yim txhiab plaub puas nees-nkaum [yi^{7} ts'ia^{5} plau^{1} pua^{5} neng^{5} ngkau^{7}]
'eight thousand four hundred and twenty'
ib txhiab cuaj puas xya caum yim [i^{1} ts'ai^{5} tyua^{2} pua^{5} sya^{4} tsau^{7} yi^{7}]
'one thousand nine hundred and seventy-eight'

K. Units of measurement: length

The units are listed in the RPA, then in the phonetic alphabet. Their equivalents in American or European systems are given, then comments, then an example sentence.

daj [da^{2}], about two meters (the distance between one's outstretched arms); used for measuring fabric, rope, lenths of field. Yang See comments, "A traditional tall Hmong male who goes downtown to buy fabric, rope, etc., prefers to use his own outstretched arms for measuring the material he wants to buy rather than relying on the dealer's European measure. The Hmong holds one end of the fabric or rope with the fingertips of his right hand. He stretches the fingertips of his left hand in the opposite direction as far as they will go, then stops." Subsequent daj's are measured by the first one.

Koj lub ris siv ob dag ntaub. 'Your pants will require
'you' clf 'pants' 'take' '2' daj 'fabric' two daj's of fabric.'

kaum [kau^{7}], half a daj, or about a meter; used for measuring fabric or paper. Says Yang See, "It is estimated that the width of a fabric roll is about a meter. Short Hmong, and especially Hmong women, use this measure for the fabric they want because they are afraid of being cheated by the dealers." One corner of the bolt of cloth is brought down the other side of the bolt; the resulting square is one kaum.

Ib kaum ntaub ua tau ib lub me-nyuam tsho.
'one' kaum 'fabric' 'use' 'can' 'one' clf 'little' 'shirt'

'One kaum of fabric is enough for a little shirt.'

txhais npab [ts'ai^{5} mba^{1}], the distance from the middle of one's chest to the farthest fingertip, i.e. half a daj; used for measuring fabric or rope.

Ib txhais npab hlua khi tsis tau nyuj.
'one' txhais npab 'rope' 'tie' neg 'can' 'cow'

'You can't lead a cow with a one-meter rope.'

taus [tau^{5}], about four inches (the length of a fist); used for measuring the girth of animals, usually pigs. A string is strung around one pig's middle, and the resulting length is halved; the buyer then measures the string by grabbing it in his fists one over the other.

Tus npua ntawd muaj tsib taus thiab plaub nti.
clf 'pig' 'there' 'have' 'five' taus 'and' 'four' 'finger'

'That pig measures five taus's and four nti's.'

nti [ndi^{4}], about three-quarters of an inch (one finger); used for fractions of taus's and xib's.

Peb tus npua tsiab muaj kaum taus thiab plaub nti.
'we' clf 'pig' 'New Year' 'have' 'ten' taus 'and' 'four' nti

'Our New Year's pig measures ten taus's and four nti's.'

xib [si^{1}], about three inches, or the width of four fingers; used for measuring wheat, fish.

See txhom tau ib tug ntse luaj ib xib.
'Sheng' 'catch' past 'one' clf 'fish' 'measure''one' xib

'Sheng caught a fish that measured one xib.'

dos [dɔ^{5}], about six inches, or the distance between the end of the thumb and the end of the moddle finger, when the hand is placed perpendicular to a surface with the fingers spread out flat; used to measure people's height, cattle's heads, posts of houses.

Koj tus tub muaj yim dos. 'Your son measures eight dos's.'
'you' clf 'son' 'have' '8' dos

L. Units of measurement: weight

choj [ty'ɔ^{2}], about a pound; used in measuring opium, gold, silver.

Xyoo no kuv sau tau ib puas choj yeeb.
'year''this' 'I' 'harvest''can' '100' choj 'opium'

'This year I can harvest one hundred choj of opium.'

lag [la^{6}], one tenth of a choj.

Niam muab ib lag yeeb ntiav Tsu txiav taws.
'mother' 'use' 'one' lag 'opium' 'hire' Tsu 'cut' 'wood'

'Mother hired Tsu to cut wood for a lag of opium.'

txiaj [tsia^{2}], one tenth of a lag, or .01 of a choj.

Ib txiaq yeeb yuav tsis tau dab tsi ntau.
'one' txiaq 'opium' 'buy' neg 'can''nothing' 'much'

'One txiaq of opium won't buy much of anything.'

fiab [fia^{1}], one tenth of a txiaj, or .001 of a choj.

Kaum fiab thiaj muaj ib txiaq yeeb. 'Ten fiab's equal one
'10' fiab 'then' 'have' '1' txiaq 'opium' txiaj of opium.'

phuv [p'u^{3}], an equal portion of game. The game is divided into the number of hunters plus one equal parts, or phuv. The killer gets two phuv, the other hunters get one each.

Pov tua raug ces nws yuav ob phuv nqaij.
'Pao' 'shoot' 'so' 'he' 'take''two'phuv 'meat'

'Pao shot it so he gets two phuv of meat.'

M. Traditional time-telling

Hmong has two systems for telling time: the traditional one is based on daily activities, and the other, which developed out of Hmongs' contact with outsiders, is based on a twenty-four hour day. Here are some of the phrases of the traditional system.

Tav li cas lawm? 'What time was it?'
'time' 'how' past

Tav caij qaib qua. 'Time of cock-crow.' (about 4 a.m.)
'time' 'cock' 'crow'

Tav caij qaib qua ib tsig. 'Time of the first cock-crow.'
'time' 'cock' 'crow''one' clf (about 4 a.m.)

Tav caij qaib qua ob tsig.	'Time of the second cock-crow.'
'time' 'cock''crow' '2' clf	
Tav caij qaib qua peg tsig.	'Time of the third cock-crow.'
'time' 'cock' 'crow' '3' clf	
Tav caij qaib qua plaub tsig.	'Time of the fourth cock-crow.'
'time' 'cock' 'crow' '4' clf	
Tav caij noj tshais.	'Breakfast time.' (about 6-7 a.m.)
'time' 'eat' 'breakfast'	
Tav caij noj su.	'Lunch time.' (about noon)
'time' 'eat' 'lunch'	
Tav caij hnub qaij.	'Time that the sun inclines.'
'time' 'sun' 'incline'	(about 1-3 p.m.)
Tav caij pub npua.	'Pig feeding time.' (about 5-6 p.m.)
'time' 'feed' 'pig'	
Tav caij noj hmo.	'Dinner time.' (about 7 p.m.)
'time' 'eat' 'dinner'	
Tav caij mus pw.	'Bedtime.' (about 8-9 p.m.)
'time' 'go' 'sleep'	

N. Days of the lunar month

Hmongs traditionally label days in cycles which correspond to the lunar month. As the moon waxes, the corresponding days are numbered from one to fifteen, with the fifteenth waxing day arriving as the moon becomes full. Then the numbering starts over again, counting fifteen days as the moon wanes. The fifteenth waning day arrives as the moon disappears. In the following chart, we arbitrarily chose the lunar month starting in May, 1978.

Date	State of Moon	Day Name	Translation
May 7	new	xiab ib	waxing 1
May 8		xiab ob	waxing 2
May 9		xiab peb	waxing 3
May 10		xiab plaub	waxing 4
May 11		xiab tsib	waxing 5
May 12		xiab rau	waxing 6
May 13		xiab xya	waxing 7
May 14		xiab yim	waxing 8
May 15		xiab cuaj	waxing 9
May 16	first quarter	xiab kaum	waxing 10
May 17		xiab kaum ib	waxing 11
May 18		xiab kaum ob	waxing 12
May 19		xiab kaum peb	waxing 13
May 20		xiab kaum plaub	waxing 14
May 21	full	xiab kaum tsib	waxing 15
May 22		nqig ib	waning 1
May 23		nqig ob	waning 2
May 24		nqig peb	waning 3
May 25		nqig plaub	waning 4
May 26		nqig tsib	waning 5
May 27		nqig rau	waning 6
May 28		nqig xya	waning 7
May 29	last quarter	nqig yim	waning 8
May 30		nqig cuaj	waning 9
May 31		nqig kaum	waning 10
June 1		nqig kaum ib	waning 11
June 2		nqig kaum ob	waning 12
June 3		nqig kaum peb	waning 13
June 4		nqig kaum plaub	waning 14
June 5		nqig kaum tsib	waning 15, or
		hli tas	moon finish
June 6	new	xiab ib	waxing 1
etc.	etc.	etc.	etc.

Examples:

Hmoob sib yauv thaum hli xiab xwb. 'Hmongs get married only when
'Hmong' 'marry' 'when' 'moon' 'wax' 'only' the moon is waxing.'

Mos thiaj Pov sib yuav xiab kaum ob. 'Mo and Pao are getting married
'Mo' 'and' 'Pao' 'marry' 'waxing' '12' on Waxing-12.'

Hnub hli nqig xya Maiv thiab Zeb yuav tuaj xyuas peb.
'day' 'moon' 'wane' '7' 'Mai' 'and' 'Zheng' fut 'come' 'visit' 'we'
'On Waning-7 Mai and Zheng will come to visit us.'

O. The seasons

Lub caij ntuj no. clf 'time' 'sky' 'cold'	The cold season (about November-January).
Lub caij luaj teb. clf 'time''clear' 'field'	Slash-and-burn time (about February-April).
Lub caij ntuj tshiab. clf 'time' 'sky' 'new'	Springtime (about May-June)
Lub caij ntuj so. clf 'time''sky' 'hot'	Summertime (about July-September).
Lub caij ntuj qhua. clf 'time''sky' 'dry'	The dry season (about October-March).
Lub caij ntuj tsaug. clf 'time''sky' 'shower'	The rain or shower season (about May-September).

P. Twelve-year cycle

Hmong years cycle like Chinese years, with each year named after a particular animal. Yang See says that this cycling is attended to by match-makers lining up eligible candidates for marriage partners. In the chart on the next page, we have matched up one Hmong cycle of years with recent western years.

Year	Name	Translation
1975	Luav xyoo	Year of the rabbit
1976	Zaj xyoo	Year of the dragon
1977	Nab xyoo	Year of the snake
1978	Nees xyoo	Year of the horse
1979	Yaj xyoo	Year of the sheep
1980	Liab xyoo	Year of the monkey
1981	Qaib xyoo	Year of the chicken
1982	Dev xyoo	Year of the dog
1983	Npua xyoo	Year of the pig
1984	Nas xyoo	Year of the rat
1985	Nyuj xyoo	Year of the ox
1986	Tsov xyoo	Year of the tiger

Examples:

Xyoo	ib	txhiab	cuaj	pua	xya	caum	yim	yog	nees	xyoo
'year'	'1'	'1,000'	'9'	'100'	'7'	'10'	'8'	'be'	'horse'	'year'

'1978 is the year of the horse.'

Vaj	thiab	Mos	sib yuav	tsaib ub	thaum	zaj	xyoo.
'Vang'	'and'	'Mo'	'marry'	'year before last'	'when'	'dragon'	'year'

'Vang and Mo got married year before last when it was the year of the dragon.'

Q. Time-telling: for outsiders

Pes	tsawg	teev	lawm?	'What time is/was it?'
'how'	'much'	'hour'	past	

Ob	teev	yav sawv ntxov.	'Two o'clock a.m.'
'2'	'hour'	'morning'	

Ob	teev	yav tsaus ntuj.	'Two o'clock p.m.'
'2'	'hour'	'evening'	

Ob	teev	kaum	fiab.	'Ten minutes after two.'
'2'	'hour'	'10'	'minute'	

Ob teev kaum tsib (fiab). 'Two fifteen.'
'2' 'hour' '10' '5' ('minute')

Ob teev ib nrab. 'Two thirty.'
'2' 'hour' '1' 'half'

Peb teev tshuav nees nkaum. 'Twenty to three.'
'3' 'hour' 'remain' 'twenty'

R. Days of the week for outsiders

The following system of weekdays has evolved out of Hmongs' contacts with outsiders.

Day	Name	Translation
Monday	Hnub ib	Day 1
Tuesday	Hnub ob	Day 2
Wednesday	Hnub peb	Day 3
Thursday	Hnub plaub	Day 4
Friday	Hnub tsib	Day 5
Saturday	Hnub rau	Day 6
Sunday	Hnub xya	Day 7

S. Months of the year for outsiders

The twelve months of the year, likewise, have been named to correspond to outsiders' reckoning of time. The Hmong New Year is some time in December. The months below are lunar months, and don't match exactly with our January, February, and so on. The lub in the names of the months is a classifier. hlis = 'moon'.

Name of month	Translation	Corresponds to
Lub ib hlis	Month one	Dec.-Jan.
Lub ob hlis	Month two	Jan.-Feb.
Lub peb hlis	Month three	Feb.-Mar.
Lub plaub hlis	Month four	Mar.-Apr.
Lub tsib hlis	Month five	Apr.-May
Lub rau hlis	Month six	May-June

Lub xya hlis	Month seven	June-July
Lub yim hlis	Month eight	July-Aug.
Lub cuaj hlis	Month nine	Aug.-Sept.
Lub kaum hlis	Month ten	Sept.-Oct.
Lub kaum ib hlis	Month eleven	Oct.-Nov.
Lub kaum ob hlis	Month twelve	Nov.-Dec.
Peb caug	New Year	December

Within the lunar month, which has thirty days, the days are numbered from 1 to 30. In referring to the first through the fifteenth of a particular month, the word xiab 'waxing' is used; otherwise, just the number is used.

Lub	tsib	hlis	tim	kaum	yim.	'The eighteenth day of Month 5'
clf	'5'	'moon'	'at'	'10'	'8'	

Lub	kaum	hlis	xiab	plaub.	'The fourth day of Month 10'
clf	'10'	'moon'	'waxing'	'4'	

T. Common phrases and dialogues

In this section, we list everyday expressions and dialogues, first in RPA, then in the phonetic alphabet, then with translation and comments. The translations are idiomatic, not literal.

Phrase	Pronunciation	Translation
Ua tsaug.	[ua^{4} chau^{6}]	Thank you. (Traditionally used only under formal ceremonial circumstances, but becoming used as an equivalent of everyday 'thank you'.)
Cia li mas.	[tyia^{4} li^{4} ma^{5}]	Thank you. (Also used only for ceremonial gift-giving and festivals.)
Tsis ua li cas. or Txhob ua tsaug.	[chi^{5} ua^{4} li^{4} tya^{5}] [ts'ɔ^{1} ua^{4} chau^{6}]	You're welcome. (Answer to everyday uses of 'thank you'.)
Zoo - kawg!	[zhong^{4} kɛi^{6}]	Good for you! That's nice!, etc.
Thov txim.	[t'ɔ^{3} tsi^{7}]	I'm sorry! I beg your pardon, etc.

Tej zaum yuav zoo sai.	[tey^{2} zhau^{7} yua^{3} zhong^{4} shai^{4}]	Get well soon!
Xwv txeej phem ua qoob loo puas tas.	[sɨ^{3} tseng^{2} p'ey^{7} ua^{4} ko̱ng^{1} long^{1} ta^{5}]	It can't be helped!
Host: Koj tuaj los.	[kɔ^{2} tua^{2} lɔ^{5}]	Hello, welcome. (This and the next eight phrases are a typical dialogue between a host and guest.)
Guest: Aws tuaj os.	[əi^{5} tua^{2} ɔ^{5}]	Answer to hello.
H: Los tsev os.	[lɔ^{5} chey^{3} ɔ^{5}]	Come in.
G: Nej puas caiv os?	[ney^{2} pua^{5} tyai^{3} ɔ^{5}]	Is there a taboo? (Sometimes a householder will decide to declare his household taboo for a day or two, for reasons of sickness, etc.)
H: Peb tsis caiv os, los tsev os.	[pey^{1} chi^{5} tyai^{3} ɔ^{5} lɔ^{5} chey^{3} ɔ^{5}]	No, there isn't. Come on in.
H: Zaum os.	[zhau^{7} ɔ^{5}]	Sit down.
H: Koj puas tau noj tshais? su? hmo?	[kɔ^{2} pua^{5} tau^{4} nɔ^{2} ch'ai^{5} su^{4} hmɔ^{4}]	Have your eaten breakfast? lunch? dinner?
G: Noj tas lawm os.	[nɔ^{2} ta^{5} lə̱ɨ^{7} ɔ^{5}]	Yes, I have.
or Tseem tsis tau noj.	[cheng^{7} chi^{5} tau^{4} nɔ^{2}]	No, I haven't.
Koj hu li cas?	[kɔ^{2} hu^{4} li^{4} tya^{5}]	What's your name?
Kuv hu ua Mos.	[ku^{3} hu^{4} ua^{4} mɔ^{5}]	My name is Mos.
Koj jog xeem dab-tsi?	[kɔ^{2} yɔ^{6} seng^{7} da^{1}-chi^{4}]	What's your clan?
Kuv yog xeem Yaj.	[ku^{3} yɔ^{6} seng^{7} ya^{2}]	I'm a Yang.
Liag yog ib tug Hmoob.	[lia^{6} yɔ^{6} i^{1} tu^{6} hmong^{1}]	Lia is a Hmong.

Koj puas yog Hmoob?	[kɔ^{2} pua^{5} yɔ^{6} hmong^{1}]	Are you a Hmong?
Yog.	[yɔ^{6}]	Yes.
Tsis yog.	[chi^{5} yɔ^{6}]	No.
Tsov tom!	[chɔ^{3} tɔ^{7}]	May the tiger bite! (Yang See says this is a strong expletive.)
Tsov kwv!	[chɔ^{3} kɨ^{3}]	May the tiger drag! (ditto)
Lus Hmoob hais li cas?	[lu^{5} hmong^{1} hai^{5} li^{4} tya^{5}]	How do you say it in Hmong?
Ob hnub no nej ua dab-tsi lawm?	[ɔ^{1} hnu^{1} nɔ^{4} ney^{2} da^{1} chi^{4} ləɨ^{7}]	What are you doing these days? (A general question, the expected reply having to do with crops.)
Niaj hnub mus nthua nplej.	[nia^{2} hnu^{1} mu^{5} nt'ua^{4} mbley^{2}]	We're weeding the rice fields. (A typical answer to the question above.)
Niaj hnub ua kam li qub xwb.	[nia^{2} hnu^{1} ua^{4} ka^{7} li^{4} ɋu^{1} sɨ^{1}]	The usual office work. (The kind of reply evolving as the language changes to accommodate people's not farming.)
Ob hnub no nej noj li cas nyob li cas?	[ɔ^{1} hnu^{1} nɔ^{4} ney^{2} nɔ^{2} li^{4} tya^{5} nyɔ^{1} li^{4} tya^{5}]	How is everyone doing?
Peb sawv daws puav leej noj qab nyob zoo.	[pey^{1} səɨ^{3} dəɨ^{5} pua^{3} leng^{2} nɔ^{2} ɋa^{1} nyɔ^{1} zhong^{1}]	We're all doing fine.
or		
Ob hnu no sawv daws tau ib phaum khaub thuas.	[ɔ^{1} hnu^{4} nɔ^{4} səɨ^{3} dəɨ^{5} tau^{4} i^{1} p'au^{7} k'au^{1} t'ua^{5}]	Everyone's got a cold.

U. Hmong dictionaries

In this section, we describe the three Hmong dictionaries which are available in the United States. None of them is a reference work of the sort we usually think of dictionaries as being--none of them, for example,

provides Hmong definitions for English or French words. They are, instead, the published vocabulary lists of the authors, who compiled the lists while they were working among the Hmongs. As such, they are more likely to be of use to Americans as a source of information on Hmong culture, than they are to Hmongs as an aid in learning English.

Bertrais-Charrier, Yves. Dictionnaire Hmong (Mèo Blanc) - Français. Vientiane: Mission Catholique, 1964. Distributed in the U.S. by The Cellar Book Shop, 18090 Wyoming, Detroit, Michigan, 48228. (Write directly to the shop: the book costs $20.00, and postage is paid by the shop for orders of $20.00 or more.)

Fr. Bertrais was in Laos for years and years, living and working, through the Catholic Mission there, with Hmongs in Louang Prabang, Xieng Khouang, and Sam Neua; he is now in Thailand, doing linguistic research on Hmong.

The dictionary lists Hmong words, and phrases the words occur in, with idiomatic translations into French, but no grammar or pronunciation notes. The words and phrases are written in the RPA--Bertrais was one of the missionary-linguists who developed the alphabet--and there are about 30,000 entries; this is the biggest dictionary, in terms of number of words and phrases, of the three. There are no appendices, and just a brief introduction outlining the sources of vocabulary and explaining the uses to which the dictionary can be put. (It also explains, among other things, that cuss words have been left out, even though they're frequently used...).

The dictionary will be of most use as a source of information on Hmong vocabulary for Americans who speak or read French. It won't help Hmongs much, except as a very roundabout approach to English for Hmongs who speak French.

Heimbach, Ernest E. White Meo-English Dictionary. Data Paper No. 75, Southeast Asia Program, Department of Asian Studies, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1969. (Order the book directly from the Southeast Asia Program, 120 Uris Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853; it costs $5.00, and postage will be paid.)

Heimbach worked as a missionary among the White Hmong in Thailand between 1954 and 1963; this dictionary is a compilation of his vocabulary notes. Heimbach was (last we heard) working in the refugee camps in Thailand.

Hmong words, and phrases containing them, are listed, with translations into English. There are some grammatical notes. The entries are in the RPA, and there's a guide to pronunciation in the introduction. The introduction also includes brief notes on the language, and a short bibliography (mostly on comparative linguistic studies of Hmong and related languages). There are several appendices; they contain, besides information contained in this Guide: patterns of tone changes; more classifiers than we list; some useful words and phrases; some useful short expressions; White Hmong proverbs, with idiomatic translations into English; a long list, with examples, of post-verbal intensifiers; kinship charts; and an English-Hmong classified vocabulary in such matters as anatomy, fauna, building, clothing and sewing,

and so on.

This dictionary, while not as extensive as the others, is the most accessible: it's in English, it's geared to non-linguists and non-anthropologists, and the price is right. Americans will find it a fascinating source of down-to-earth information on things Hmong. The vocabulary is for natural reasons not terribly useful to Hmongs learning English in the U.S.; as it was collected in Hmong villages, it obviously doesn't contain Hmong words for American artifacts, which is what the Hmong English-learner is in most need of at this point.

Lyman, Thomas A. Dictionary of Mong Njua. The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton, 1974. (Orderable from Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 07716; write to them for a form, which says that you agree that the book is not returnable; sent the form and $68.00 back, and the book will be sent to you from the Netherlands in about ten weeks.)

Lyman worked as an anthropologist among the Hmongs in northern Thailand in 1949, then from 1962 to 1964, and from 1966 to 1967. This dictionary is a compilation of his vocabulary notes; a grammar of Mong Njua and a study of Mong Njua ethnography will be published later.

This is a work for linguists and anthropologists. Mong Njua (= Blue/Green Hmong) words and phrases are listed in an alphabet which is a cross between a phonemic and phonetic transcription; the words and phrases are translated into idiomatic English, and borrowings from other languages are noted. The Introduction contains a guide to the alphabet used; some information on the structure of compound words; a chart of correlations between the alphabet used and the RPA; explanations of ways the words have been classified and listed in the dictionary; an extensive bibliography of studies (mostly anthropological) of various Hmong groups throughout China and Southeast Asia; and a list of Hmong sub-groups. In the appendices, there are--besides information contained in this Guide--English-Mong Njua lists of body terms, colors, ethnic names, minerals and oils, tools, instruments and weapons; Mong Njua-English lists of terms pertaining to weaving, vegetation, sickness and medicine, rice, opium and related artifacts, kin numeratives, the husking-treadle, and compass points.

The price will probably put this dictionary out of reach of most, but colleges and universities in areas where there are lots of Hmongs will find this a useful acquisition. Non-linguists and non-anthropologists will have a rough time with the alphabet, as it has a lot of unfamiliar symbols; Hmongs won't be able to read it at all.

V. Hmong leaders in Laos

This section is more or less a cast of characters in Hmong affairs in Laos over the last twenty years or so. These names come up again and again in newspaper articles and journals. We list the individuals below, by name given in its usual Romanized spelling, with an explanation of the clan membership and adoption of last name and so on. Then we give a brief account of the individual's place in recent Hmong history.

Touby Lyfoung

Tub Npis Lis Foom in RPA. Touby is a member of the Lis clan; for official purposes he combined the Lis with his father's name (Foom), and the combination serves as his last name. Tub is the diminutive; Npis is his given name. He was the first Hmong to hold a seat on the Council of the Royal Lao Government, and held that seat on and off between 1962 and 1975. When last heard of, he was in a reeducation camp operated by a joint North Vietnamese-Pathet Lao group of authorities. According to unconfirmed sources, he died in late 1975.

Tou Geu Lyfoung

Tub Ntxawg Lis Foom in RPA. Tub is the diminutive; Ntxawg is his given name; the Lyfoung is the combination of his Lis clan name and his father's name Foom. Tou Geu is Touby's brother, and was the general director of the Justice Department of the Royal Lao Government from 1964 to 1975. He is now in France.

Tou Lia Lyfoung

Tub Liab Lis Foom in RPA. Tub is the diminutive; Liab is his given name; the Lyfoung is the same combination as for the two men listed above. Tou Lia is Touby's older brother, who was, for one term in 1960, the representative from Xieng Khouang (the region where most of the Hmongs come from) to the Royal Lao Government. Tou Lia is still in Vientiane.

Moua Lia

Muas Liab in RPA. Muas is the clan name; Liab is the man's given name. Moua Lia was the Primary School inspector for Xieng Khouang Province between 1962 and 1975; as such, he was responsible for all the educational programs that were set up in the Hmong refugee towns that sprang up as warfare was carried on in the mountains. Moua Lia is now in France.

Yang Dao

Yaj Daus in RPA. Yaj is the man's clan name; Dao or Daus is the name he is known by by outsiders; his given name is Tsab, but only Hmongs use it. Yang Dao is the first Ph.D. among the Hmongs in Laos, and is recognized as their foremost intellectual. He got his doctorate in France; his dissertation was published in Vientiane in 1975 as Les Hmongs Du Laos Face Au Developpement, and is considered the authoritative work on the recent history of the Laotian Hmongs. Yang Dao was, from 1972-1975, on various Royal Lao Government committees, and in 1972 he was part of the Joint National Political Council of the Coalition Government of the Royal Laos and Pathet Laos. He is now in France.

General Vang Pao

Vaj Pov in RPA. The general belongs to the Vaj or Vang clan; Pov is his given name. This is the famous general of the Royal Lao Government's Irregular Army (or Armee Clandestine in French), whose name and activities appear in practically everything that has been written about Laos and/or the Hmongs in the last twenty years. He is now in the United States, alternating between Orange County, California and Missoula, Montana.

Faydang (Lor)

Faiv Ntaj Lauj in RPA. Faiv is the man's honorary name; Ntaj is his

given name; he is a member of the Lor or Lauj clan. Faydang was the foremost Hmong on the Pathet Lao side of the war; he is now the vice-chairman of the Pathet Lao Administrative Committee.

Lor Foung

Lauj Foom in RPA. Lauj is the clan name; Foom is the man's given name. This is Faydang's younger brother, who in 1972 was a member, on the Pathet Lao side, of the Joint Political Council of the Coalition Government.

Gnia (or Nhia) Vu Lor

Gnia Vu Lor is Faydang's brother. He is the most powerful Hmong Communist and has been on the Pathet Lao Central Committee for many years. Presently, he is with the Ministry of Lao Ethnics.